

Deadly Riddles

Updated by Josh H. (u/TrickishWheat8) from SJR8 *Space Lairs*

Location: Wildspace (Rogue Planet)

Party: 5 Players of levels 4-5

Set up:

- The party's ship, in need of an air exchange, happens upon a rogue planet floating free within the sphere.
- The party members have heard a dwarf explorer speak of a recent voyage, in which, while in orbit around a rogue planet, he sighted a luminescent golden ore called glod (pronounced "glowed"). The PCs decided to visit the planet and collect some ore for research.
- A crazy dwarf merchant has hired the party to bring back a supply of glod. The PCs now approach a rogue planet, the only known source of glod in all the spheres. The merchant gave them the impression that the glod could make them all rich.

The Glod:

Glod, pronounced "glowed", is a luminous golden ore that gives off light when agitated by electrical charge or seismic activity. Despite its apparent value, it might as well be fool's glod. Many adventurers have risked their lives for the glimmering substance that glows dull, brittle, and unusable a few days after being mined. Unless the PCs can offload the metal, it is more likely to end up as space debris than a paycheck.

The Astrosphinx:

Astrosphinx are usually not the sanest of the sphinx family. This creature is quite mad, even by those standard. The tall, horned beast with a dragonlike body and bat wings has killed every living creature on this planet, and any who visit. It does not realize its home is self-destructing and it wouldn't care if it did. This Astrosphinx exists only to kill, eat, and ask riddles.

When the sphinx confronts the party it will always challenge them to a game of riddles as described in *The Motherlode*. This creature will stalk the party from the moment they land, hiding behind rocks, hills, and anything it can. If at any point the party splits, it will happily confront the weaker side or single creature.

If things go badly, the Astrosphinx will fly away. Although crazy, it is not suicidal.

The Planetoid:

Your ship is pulled out of spelljamming speed in the presence of a small rogue planetoid, less than 10 miles in diameter. Even from this distance you can see plumes of red liquid boil and

spew across almost all of the planet. Now and again, large boulders fly through the planet's air before crashing violently back to the surface.

Your eyes are drawn to the top pole where a large golden luminance spills in to space. It looks as if a number of pockets and caves contribute to the overall light. Taking in the beautiful glow, you notice that this area do not seem to be actively exploding though its surface is still rough and uneven.

Players immediately notice the north pole of the planet as a rocky and mountainous place with a glow large enough to be seen from space. Any group should be intrigued by this area enough to investigate and is further reinforced by the rest of the planet.

If the players investigate any other part of the planet, they notice the violent tectonic activity occurring. Large pillars of lava are thrown out in to space while hills build up only to blow ship-sized boulders across the surface. In fact, the planetoid is totally unstable and falling apart. It is very unlikely that it will remain should the players wish to return. Attempting to land anywhere aside from the northern pole is simply impossible and will destroy the players' ship. Even at the north pole, flying a ship close to the ground and by the many caves is incredibly difficult due to the sharp surface features. The players should get the feel that a short walk by foot is best.

When the players decide to land at the north pole, there is a clearing large enough to accommodate their ship and a 5% chance a second abandoned ship will be present (the crew having been slaughtered by the planet's denizen).

Finally, the planetoid is completely devoid of natural life. Despite looking like it could be sustained, the sphinx has methodically challenged every living thing with riddles down to the insects. Needless to say, this apex predator won.

On the Ground:

Entering the planet's air greets you with a rather warm and dry environment, in the distance, dull and quite rumbles can be heard echoing from miles away. Spying the ground, you see hills, bluffs, and plains broken up by crevasses, boulders, and spires.

Nearby, a suitable flat surface looks like it could handle your ship, the first of such locations and a short walk from a large deposit of glowing ore.

Your ship approaches the ground and kicks up a small cloud of ash and brings the smell of sulfur to your senses. To the north, a large glow lights the horizon like a city. Sparse vegetation, caves, and minor glows dot the way.

After landing, the players are free to begin exploring the surface. The ground surrounding the landing site is rough. The seismic activity has created foothills and plains featuring wide crevasses and scattered boulders. Despite the warmth, no animals or living creatures can be seen. The antagonist of their adventure, the Astrosphinx, is aware of their presence and stalking their moves.

A short walk away, the players can see the main deposit, a large collection of glod formed in what looks like the base of a mountain. This lights up the horizon as an obvious beacon to the

north. Smaller caves and deposits dot the way to the motherlode. The players should see and explore at least three caves before reaching the large deposit. More can be added to taste, though the players are free to pass by all on the way.

First Cave:

Traveling towards the north, you spy a moderate, shallow cave under a rocky overhang. On the wall run a few veins of a glowing metal, illuminating the area in a dim golden glow.

Before moving forward, the ground beneath your feet shudders and buckles. You hear a low rumble to the west and watch as the metal increase their intensity; shedding a now bright light.

Towards the center of the wall, old writing appears to be meticulously etched into the stone.

The players have their first run-in with glod and get to observe its interaction with the tectonic activity. The players are free to collect the metal and can garner enough to fill a backpack. Despite being a metal, mining it is rather easy with a DC 12 check.

The writing is from the Astrosphinx back when it was still mostly sane many years ago. The words are appropriately weathered but still legible, and nicely written, in common: "Fire within, yet I burn cold. I never touch the things I hold. What am I?" The answer is "a mirror" but nothing happens when spoken or etched. This is simply foreshadowing.

Second Cave:

Continuing towards the large deposit, you see opening on your left. A faint glow illuminates the area from its depths but nothing draws your attention more than the three decomposing bodies with shredded clothes pressed against the back wall.

Approaching, it appears as if the deceased became cornered by something and were backed in to a corner. They lie in defensive positions with weapons drawn; apparently not enough for whatever happened. Fresh scratches appear before the bodies. No, not scratches, but a words carved large in to the stone floor.

The Astrosphinx was here and killed these poor adventurers unable to answer his crazed questions. This question was "How is a mouse when it spins?" and lacks the time and effort put in to the previous writing. This is the writing of a mad beast to which the answer was "forty-two". It does not make sense and if, by some miracle, the players answer correctly, nothing happens.

The bodies still have flesh. A DC 10 check will show scorch marks that denote the cause of death. Beating a DC 15 alerts the players that the burn marks flow from one point to another on the fallen adventurers; a sign of lightning having coursed through their

bodies. The two with metal weapons have the lightning path start there and flow through an exit wound elsewhere. The one without has a burn right through the heart.

Across the bodies, the players can find their equipment: a shortsword, a greatsword, a burnt shield, a quarterstaff, a necklace with a wheat-like pattern (Amulet of the Drunkard), some coin and personal effects. Otherwise, the players can mine the glod (DC 12) for a meager amount.

Treasure: Amulet of the drunkard, a finely crafted ring of platinum carved to be two serpents swallowing each other's tails (400gp), Copper bracelet set with banded agates and turquoise (110gp), 50pp, 100gp.

Third Cave:

Nearing the base of the large glow you see a cave entrance at least 15 feet high and just as wide nestled in the base of a hill. Unlike the other openings you have seen, this one is dark, betraying the depth of the cavern.

Lighting the opening shows a corridor that continues about 30 feet before opening up beyond. Going to the end of the corridor reveals a large circular room. Piles of bones, clothes, scrap, and various objects are built up against the wall to the forward left. To the right, a large pile of pelts and cloth form some kind of bed 15 feet in diameter and depressed in the center from use. A certain musk fills your nose, ozone and offal.

Finally, every inch of this cavern appears to be covered in phrases, ranging from meticulously carved to quickly scratched. Most are in common, others appear in a strange, hieroglyphic language.

The players have found the Astrosphinx's lair full of its many former kills eaten at its convenience. The markings on the walls are more of the sphinx's various riddles and should come across and the rantings of a madman. One of the more meticulously-carved riddles reads "I don't exist in place or time yet there is more of me than stars that shine. What am I?" A more loosely-written one reads as "What is the speed of blue?" Finally, one is written in a crazy manner and spells "ughphoti". The answers are "nothing", "half of purple", and "fish" respectively but nothing will happen if the party figured it out. The other hieroglyphic ones are written in the language of Sphinx, unknown to the party.

Searching the corpse pile reveals bones gnawed clean, an oily potion (Oil of Slipperiness), items, and coin. Along to wall are 2 tons of metal ship scrap.

Treasure: 3000sp, 300gp, 80pp, 2 tons of metal scrap (300gp per), oil of slipperiness.

The Motherlode:

You finally reach the source of the glow, a hill made entirely of the golden metal gently pulsing with each rumble of the ground. Clearing this motherlode will take years and many galleons of cargo space.

Approaching the pile you hear a clapping of large hands behind you. A beast stands there twice as tall as a man with a body made of brass scales. Legs and mane of a large cat, wings of a bat, and clawed humanoid hands draw your attention for mere moments before you lock eyes with the violet pinpoints of light shining from the depths of its bare bovine skull.

The party has now met the Astrosphinx. As is its nature, it will offer them a riddle in exchange for their lives. If they succeed, it will let them go though it has no intention of letting them win. If they refuse or try to alter the deal, it will immediately attack. It offers them the following rules: It offers them a riddle, then they get to ask a riddle, and so on until someone answers incorrectly or refuses to answer. Any attempt to change these rules will send the beast into a rage. Any way you slice it, this beast intends to win. It asks this riddle: "What do kobolds and the Spelljammer have in common, aside from triangles?"

There is no answer. The beast has become so crazed, it never bothered to make one. The only hope for the players is to answer something equally ridiculous. If they do, there is a 5% chance they are right, prompting the sphinx to cry in incredulous surprise, accuse the party of cheating, and promptly explode in a burst of lightning. Anything within 15 feet of the sphinx rolls a DC 13 Dex Save, taking 10d6 damage on a failure and half on a save. The sphinx leaves behind its skull and a scroll with loose directions to the grand ship itself, the Spelljammer. The other 95% of the time, the sphinx informs the players they are wrong and attacks.

Encounter: Astrosphinx

The sphinx fights as long as it thinks it may win and may toy with the adventurers at first. As the fight turns, it will attempt to flee, using its flying to its advantage.

As mentioned, Glod illuminates when struck by an electrical charge. The Astrosphinx may direct some or all of its chain lightning ability at the large Glod deposit to blind the PCs as opposed to damaging them. One charge prompts all creatures who can see the deposit (except for the Astrosphinx since it will be blind already) to make a DC 10 Con Save or be blinded until the end of their next turn. For each additional charge absorbed at once by the Glod, increase this DC by 3.

When the encounter concludes, the players are free to take as much glod as they can carry and leave this dreaded rock. Lollygagging parties can be prompted to leave with earthquakes or the return of a rested sphinx.